

# The OMEN

RASCALY  
RACHEL I THEN, ED.

"BIG BEN"  
BATCHELDER

FROLICKIN'  
F. STEWS, COVER

100%  
**FREE!**  
(SUBMIT)





# Staff

Grace Wiley

"Aliens"

Jon "Omen Kid" Gardner

"THEY ARE ALREADY HERE"

Rachel Ithen

"Her makeup looked nice."

Stephen Morton

"Channeling House of Leaves"

F. Stewart-Taylor

"Seeeevaahn"

Will Shattuc

"If you two don't have sex, and  
I don't get to watch, this will be  
the worst wedding night ever."

Allison McCarthy

"Seeeevaahhhhhhhnnnnn"

Devin Morse

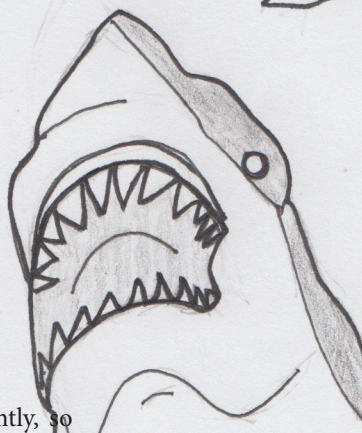
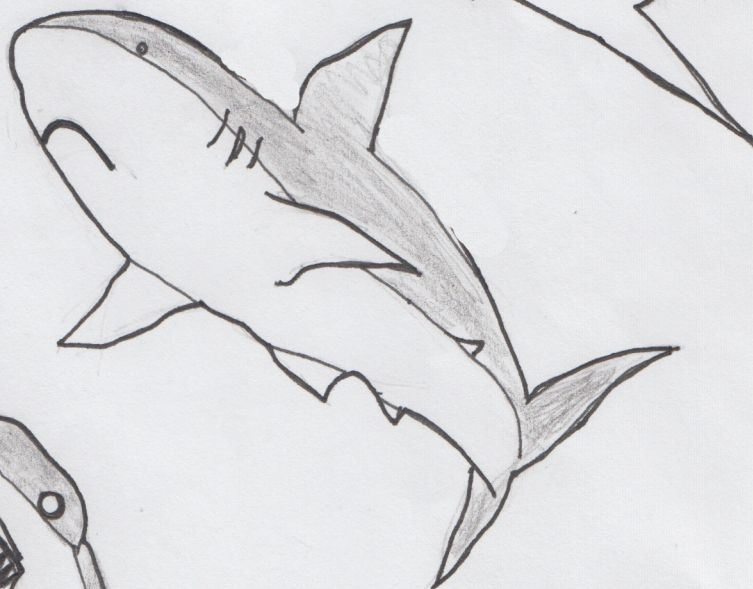
"In my mind."

HEH HEH... HERE'S A  
FISHWIVES' TALE FROM YOUR  
UNCLE FRANKY... HEH...  
& you'd better

LISTEN, UNLESS YOU  
WANT TO GET TOOK...

## Hook, LINE, &

# SINKER



Submissions are due always, constantly, so  
submit forever. You can submit in rich text  
or plain text format by CD, Flash Drive,  
singing telegram, carrier pigeon, paper  
airplane, Fed-Ex, Pony Express, or email.  
Get your submissions to [omen@hampshire.edu](mailto:omen@hampshire.edu)  
or F. Stewart-Taylor, box 1092



# EDITORIAL

by Rachel Ithen

Dear readers,

Today's layout marks the beginning of a new era for the Omen staff. Although hanging out in the Omen office eating food and chatting and watching bad YouTube videos while one person sat at a computer doing the actual layout was fun, my fellow signer Fiona has brilliantly decided to get new folks involved by, well, actually involving them. As of today, the Omen will be broken up into sections (well, that's not new), each of which will be done by one specific section editor.

This is fantastic for quite a few reasons. As I said before, this will mean we'll have more folks learning InDesign and sitting behind a computer and actually doing layout-y things. Secondly, this will give new students more opportunities to fulfill their CEL requirements via the Omen. And additionally, if the thought of merely hanging around with us in the isolated Merrill basement previously intimidated you, you can hopefully find solace in the fact that now, if you show up to layout, we can totally give you legitimate things to DO!

Now you have pretty much no reason not to show up to layout. But if you want some more reasons...

1. We sometimes listen to Canadian folk music.
  2. We sometimes eat pizza and sometimes eat fries and haven't eaten samosas yet but I think it's universally accepted by the Omen staff that this will happen someday soon.
  3. You can come and go as you please! We officially start at 8 and end at... who knows when? But there are no set requirements or limits for your participation.
  4. We have fun things to play with in the Omen office, like a snorkel, and pogs, and a big red bouncy ball.
  5. We have lovely, calm conversations. Occasionally.
- Come check it out for yourself. And submit to [omen@hampshire.edu](mailto:omen@hampshire.edu).

The Omen loves you, folks.

<3 Rachel

THE OFFICIAL OMEN HAIKU:

**Views in the Omen (5)**

**Do not necessarily (7)**

**Reflect the staff's views (5)**

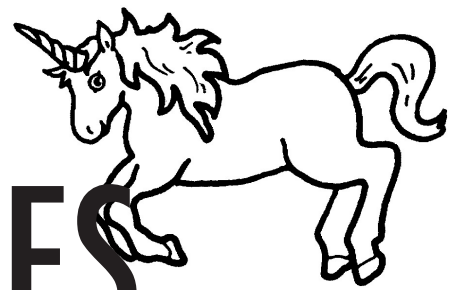
## Policy

The Omen is a biweekly publication that is the world's only example of the consistent application of a straightforward policy: we publish all signed submissions from members of the Hampshire community that are not libelous. Send us your impassioned yet poorly-thought-out rants, self-insertion fan fiction, MS Paint comics, and whiny emo poetry: we'll publish it all, and we're happy to do it. The Omen is about giving you a voice, no matter how little you deserve it. Since its founding in December of 1992 by Stephanie Cole, the Omen has hardly ever missed an issue, making it Hampshire's longest-running publication.

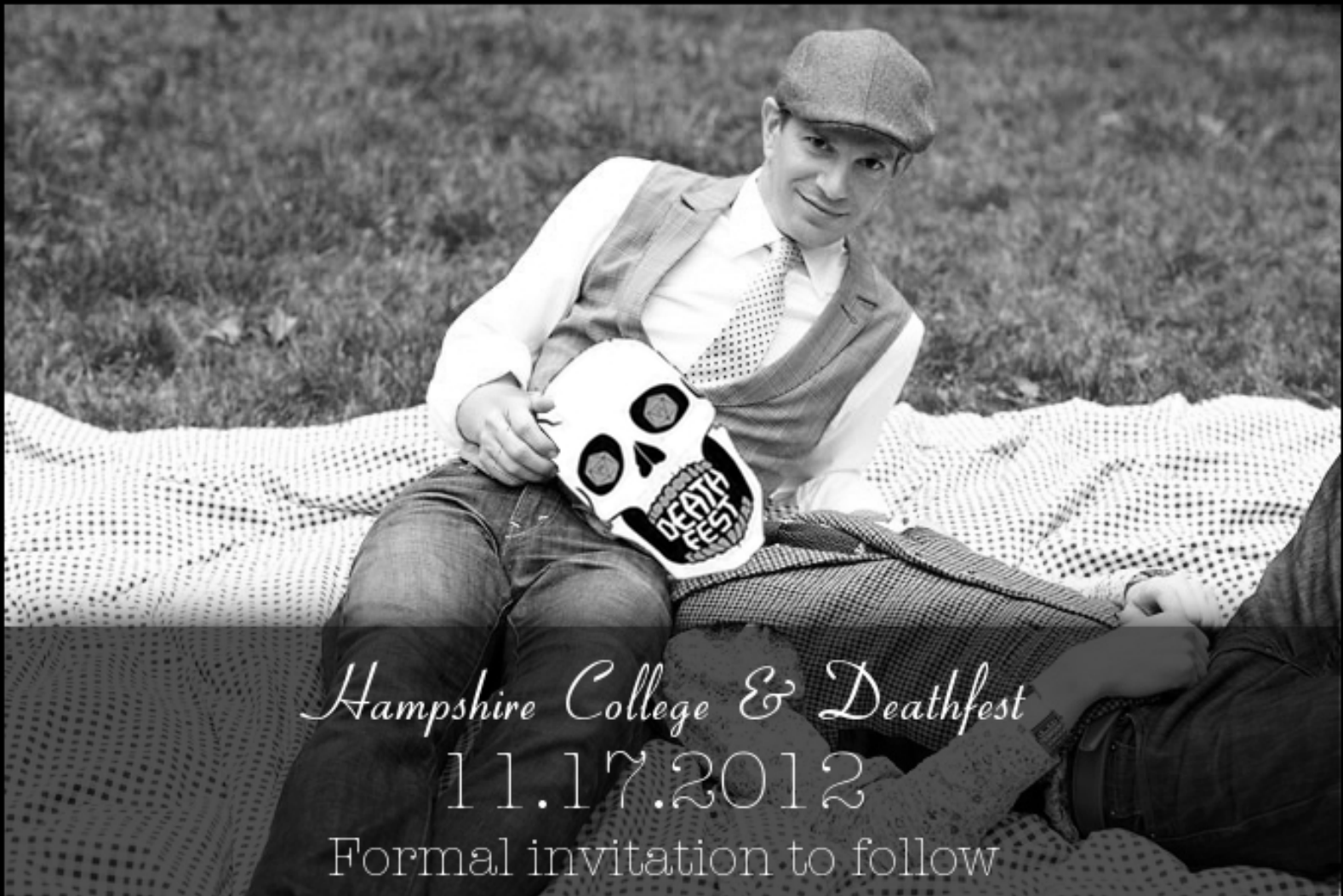
Your Omen submission (you're submitting right now, right?) might not be edited, and we can't promise any spellchecking either, so any horrendous mistakes are your fault, not ours. We do promise not to insert comical spelling mistakes in submissions to make you look foolish. Your submission must include your real name: an open forum comes with a responsibility to take ownership of your views. (Note: Views expressed in the Omen do not necessarily reflect the views of the Omen editor, the Omen staff, or anyone, anywhere, living or dead.)

The Omen staff consists of whoever shows up for Omen layout, which usually takes place on alternate Thursday nights in the basement of Merrill on a computer with an extremely inadequate monitor. You should come. We don't bite. You can find the Omen on other Thursdays in Saga, the post office, or on the door of your mod.

# SECTION: LIES



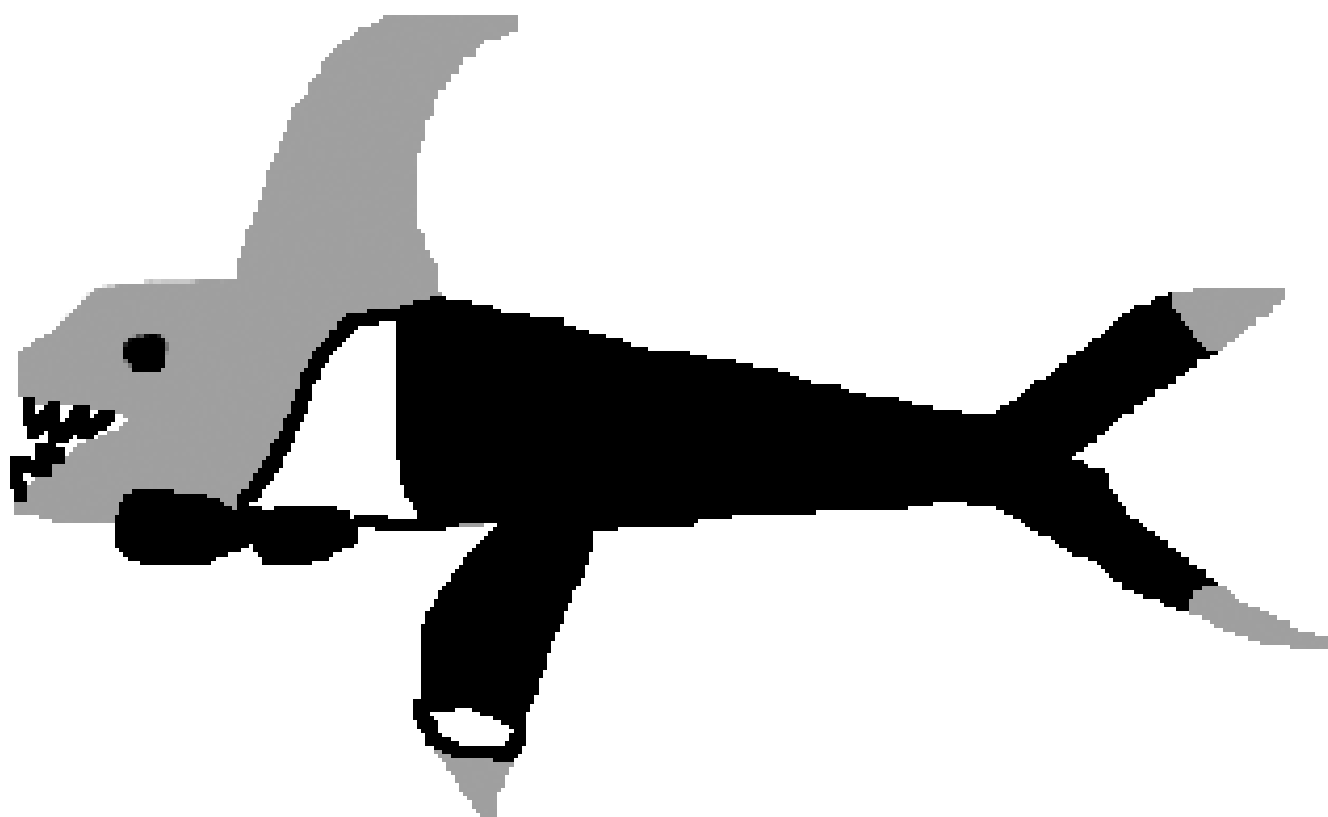
Section Edited by Jon "Omen Dude" Gardner  
Our Omen Kid is growing up!



*Hampshire College & Deathfest*  
11.17.2012  
Formal invitation to follow

Submitted by Fiona Stewart-Taylor





Submitted by Jonathan Gardner



# MISS OCTOBER

SASSY  
SCHOOLBADGER







Submitted by Fiona Stewart-Taylor



Section  
Editor  
Grace  
Wiley  
Coyote



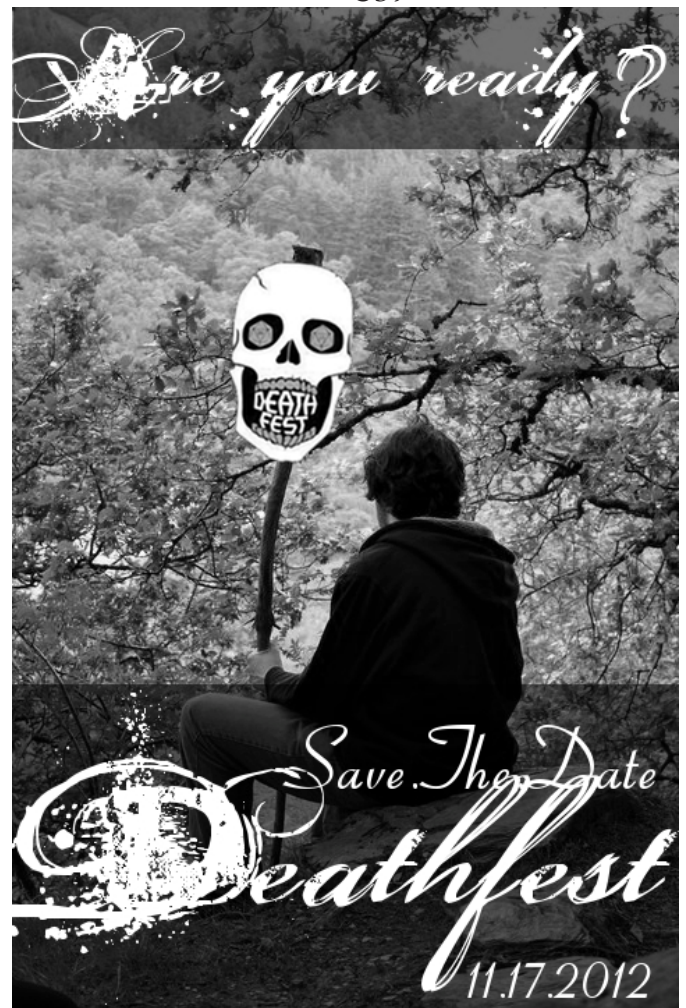
BOOK PROBLEMS - Grace Wiley



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## The Omen · Vol. 39, #2

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Submitted by Stephen Morton



Jon "Omen Formerly a Kid" Gardner

# Just a little thing I wrote

Zoe Fuller

I had written this a number of years ago after squabbling with someone about being called “little” in an affectionate way, as in “You’re my favorite little artist”.

I thought that I came up with a good, if opinionated, rant.

---

I’ve been wondering for some time at my reaction to your affectionate use of the word “little”. It is something that I do have a real problem with, and I want to think about why. I do not just make a fuss about it in order to be cute.

I think, foremost, it’s a feminist or masculinist concern. I’ve been wondering for some time if the body size dimorphism negates any possibility humans might have of getting to a position of equality and even footing for the sexes. I believe that one cannot look at issues of one sex in isolation from the other; that the issues affecting one are inextricably caught up with the other. Before I get into that, though, let’s look at the dictionary definition of little.

little | litl |

adjective

small in size, amount, or degree (often used to convey an appealing diminutiveness or express an affectionate or condescending attitude) :the plants will grow into little bushes | a little puppy dog | a boring little man | he’s a good little worker. See note at small .

- (of a person) young or younger : my little brother | when she was little she was always getting into scrapes.
- denoting something, esp. a place, that is named after a similar larger one : New York’s Little Italy.
- used in names of animals and plants that are smaller than related kinds.
- of short distance or duration : stay for a little while | we climbed up a little way.
- relatively unimportant; trivial (often used ironically) : we have a little problem | I can’t remember every little detail.

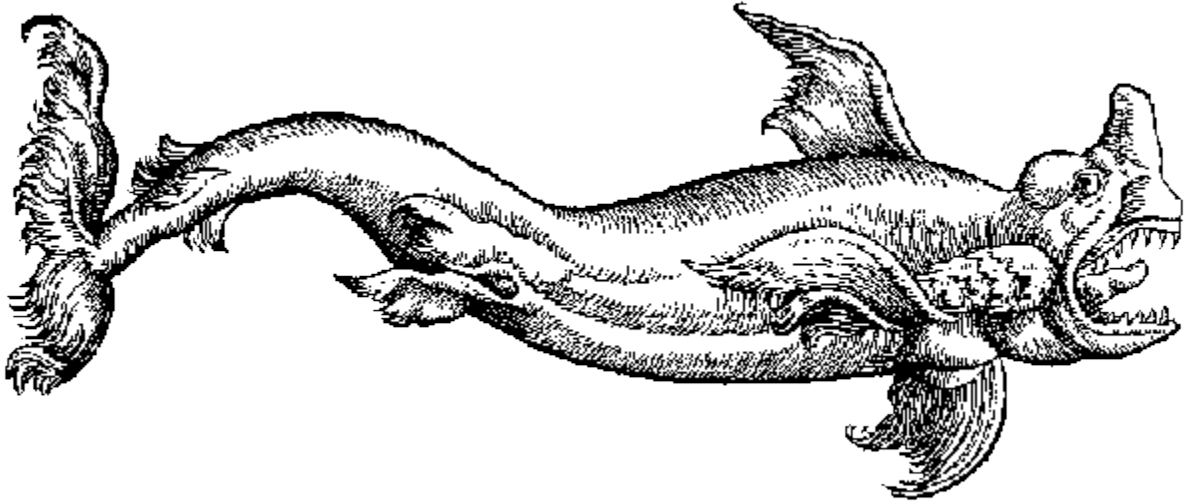
We can see that the term is used affectionately, but used in a “condescending” way, or to denote something “unimportant”, “trivial” or “young”, to quote. The term little implies childishness, which is something that I don’t wish to associated with. I feel like the term implies a lack of significant capacities, opinions or skills. Women and younger people both are tagged with the term “little”, and it functions as a way to keep them in a certain position.

I’m not saying that you are doing this. In fact, I do not think that you are. However, I’m telling you why it makes me cringe. I think the use of the word little is intended as endearing. I imagine that there is a appeal in the stature of smaller people. I know that I find people taller than I attractive. I don’t think there is anything wrong with it.

The thing is, it would seem strange and uncommon if I made frequent comments about you being “big”. Even if they were endearing, it isn’t something I am accustomed to say, or you are accustomed to hear. (Perhaps this is a injustice also) I think that there is a strange acceptance of language that expresses diminutive characteristics in females. This may point to an over-discussion of female bodies, and a absence of discussion of male bodies.



# Delphinus



*"Delphinus is a monster of the see..."*

*Delphinus is a monster of the see, & it hath no voyce, but it singeth lyke a man / and towarde a tempest it playeth vpon the water. Some say whan they be taken that they wepe. The Delphin hath none eares for to here / nor no nose for to smelle / yet it smelleth very well & sharpe. And it slepeth vpon the water very hartely, that thei be hard ronke a farre of / and thei leue C.xl. yere. & they here gladly playnge on instrumentes, as lutes / harpes / tabours / and pypes. They loue their yonges very well, and they fede them longe with the mylke of their pappes / & they haue many yonges, & amonge them all be .ij. olde ones, that yf it fortunied one of the yonges to dye, than these olde ones wyll burye them depe in the gorwind of the see / because othere fisshes sholde nat ete thys dede delphyn; so well they loue theyr yonges. There was ones a kinge that had taken a delphin / whyche he caused to be bounde with chaynes fast at a hauen where as the shippes come in at / & there was alway the pyteoust wepyng / and lamentynge, that the kinge coude nat for pyte / but let hym go agayne.*

The Dolphin is a monster of the sea; it has no voice, but sings like a man, and just before a storm it plays upon the water. Some say that when they are captured they weep. The Dolphin has no ears to hear with, nor nose to smell with, yet it can smell very well and sharply. And it sleeps upon the water very heartily, so that it can be far from hard rocks. They live 140 years, and they gladly listen to the playing of musical instruments, such as lutes, harps, tabors, and pipes. They love their young very well, and breast-feed them for a long time. They have many young, and among them there are always 2 old ones, so that if it happened that one of the young were to die, then these old ones will bury them deep in the ground of the sea so that other fish will not eat the dead dolphin, so well they love their young. There was once a king that had captured a dolphin which he caused to be bound fast with chains at a haven where ships come in at, but there was always the most pitiful weeping and lamenting that the king, in pity, let him go again.

The above illustration is from Konrad Gesner's *Historia Animalia* (Second edition, 1604) and shows a "Delphin."

Will "Shaman-For-Hire" Shattuc

# SECTION

SECTION EDITOR DEVIN MORSE

## Hey there Omen:

Arisia - the best little nerdhouse in Boston - is gearing up for its 2013 run. In which I am playing a large part. For reasons passing understanding (but pronounced "too much free time")

Part of the gear-up is getting a design for the staff t-shirt. This is the t-shirt that'll be given to the few hundred people who'll work the con as volunteers... and nobody else.

## We're looking for designs.

There are, as of this moment, no limitations. The work can be Arisia-specific or not; it can incorporate the title or not; it can be in 16.7 million colors or 2 or 1 or none.

Send one design - or ALL THE DESIGNS - to [davidaxel@arisia.org](mailto:davidaxel@arisia.org)

Tell your friends! Tell your enemies! SUBMIT HARD.

If you're picked, you'll get... uh... a t-shirt. And geek cred. Or something. Or butts.

Butts!

-David "daxel" Kurtz-





## Trigger Warning:

This article is potentially triggering for issues of privilege denial, racism, sexism, transphobia, pedantry, and tortured syntax.

Omen Staff are not responsible nor do we endorse, espouse, or spellcheck, the views herein. We do have to publish them, though. Refer to the Omen policy statement on the front page.

I'm trapped in a cage of my own making.

Love, Fiona.

## Consider this by Nathan Anecone

I don't believe any of this, I'm just saying it because I wanted to think about this stuff without taking a class about it. They are just thoughts suspended. No permanent conviction attaches them together. Self-bias undeniably exists quite commonly and irrevocably in myself and in others; and knowing that I have not seen everything in the world, or considered every possibility, it would be stupid of me to think what I'm saying is a definitive statement. But I'm going to try anyways. To strive for the transparency of the conscience is far better than to spruce up a false appearance. It's helpful to think something not to believe it or proclaim certain knowledge, but to simply see what's genuinely on one's mind with all the filters removed. It might have been better to let sleeping dogs lie, but here it goes. Sometimes to gain new understanding you have to deal with unpleasantness. If we are going to pretend that ugly emotions don't underlie talk about these problems why do we bother to address them? I thought: "if I am polite and obsequious I will not generated a response." The truth I find the complexity of humanity neutrally interesting and the diversity of patterns and contrasts and shades is generally good.

It was needed of me to bring ugly feelings to the surface without letting those feelings define me.

I don't think it is just the wording that offended. It is instinctive for people to have an aversion to rebukes of their beliefs. I said some things mistakenly. I see that no-one begrudged me and that I was misreading the situation. I don't know what caused me to do this, I guess I felt judged. I'm fallible. My one proviso: please note that I'm trying to discuss icky topics without drawing seeking to draw attention to anyone personally.

I wanted to show that white people, especially urbanized whites, are susceptible to the same kind of marginalization that others might undergo. On several occasions I was made to feel marginalized for my physical features, but the fact remains this was a few cases. In all cases these taunts came from what I infer were disenfranchised young men who are raised into a machismo culture that I

understand and have studied, and who must have saw in my style of dress, my glasses, my bookish demeanor and my skin something to hold in contempt. I thought this was an odd sensation, so I thought about it. Either way most of the time people of all forms and tints got along just fine side by side, the sun shined, it was great. Nothing I've experienced had anything systematic. When it is said that white people are immune from this type of ostracism and someone disagrees they get lambasted as a "privilege denier." Now that is a set of traps.

On impulse I didn't exactly have the compunction to use precise language. If I apologize for anything it is this. It led to some and probably offending gaffs, such as the particularly regrettable mention of such and such "dressing 'black'". I am well aware no such thing as a racial dress code exists. That's why I put it in scare quotes. One of my limitations is that I don't know how to name clothing styles. I figured people would get what I meant and probably most did, crude an expression as it is. Besides I used this term not from my voice, but from the voice of ignorant people who used it to criticize white kids for dressing in the way I meant. It was meant to show that white people are equally susceptible to the sort of "boundary reinforcement" of cultural expectations that people of color also encounter. The term "minority subculture" is an awfully slippery one, and maybe some people consider it disparaging. Unfortunately I don't have an acceptable replacement term and have to grope with the language that I've got. I was trying to be clinical and objective. I could have rightfully used the term "minority subculture" to talk about the class of individuals who avidly enjoy playing chess and nobody would break out the pitchforks. I have a philosophy about written words which I mistakenly believed was common. I thought it was impossible to be offended by written words; I never have been and never will be. They are so detached.

It's clear that gender identity does not have to rigidly correlate with the particulars of anatomy, or that "muscle mass" is the sole property of the post-pubescent males of our species. I personally happen to know a woman body-builder who could beat the average man in an arm-wrestling contest. I'm aware that there are male-bodied individuals who identify as female and so on. You can identify as a girl or a boy, both, neither, a chicken, a spaceship! That doesn't change the fact that there are high-frequency overlaps of hormonal, neurological and anatomical structure among large subsets of the population and therefore overlaps in behavioral disposition which makes a classification of biological sex a sensible concept. Because behavior results from brain physiology, which is influenced by genetics, prenatal chemistry and socialization, it is fair to suggest that gender roles are not absolutely arbitrary social norms and that people with certain hormonal and neurological underpinnings may be predisposed to adopt given gender roles innately. I know "gender role" is an iffy term but I leave it be for now because it isn't my primary concern.

The phrase "still have a hard time getting by in the U.S." in reference to Irish and Italian Americans is so vague as to be meaningless and should not have been written. (Correction: the Fighting Irish emblem is actually the logo of University of Notre Dame, not the Celtics, and its hair-color is grey-blue, not red. I regret these inaccuracies and the dissonance they might have caused. It has come to my attention that some Irish Americans take this leprechaun caricature as a point of pride, but to my eyes it promotes the negative stereotype.)

I regret these comments. I wish to retract and disown myself from them.

I realize my limited perspective does not come remotely near to encompassing all of the relevant human experience crowded around these problems. I've encountered mostly working class norms growing up. My only saving grace is that I'm pretty good at school, otherwise there's a good bet I'd end up somewhere I don't want to be. I thought I had some perspective to share. Shit maybe I don't, I don't know unless I try. The whole reason I entered myself into this is that I think I actually have perspective on some of these issues and if they're interesting why not

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go through with it? I'm not making any judgments or assumptions about anybody.

Let others speak for their own experience. Yes, I do in fact "sometimes find the environment around me to be savage and pitiless," in my town, NOT because there are lots of African, Asian, and Latino Americans in that environment, but because there are lots of drug-addicts, robbers and gun-toting gang-bangers, a beautiful human rainbow of them, doing bad things in the night. It's irrelevant what race the gangbangers are; they could resemble delightful cartoon characters from a cartoonist whimsy and it wouldn't matter. The problem is their behavior, which projects a climate of menace and selfishness. If you've never been to the ghetto you wouldn't understand. Maybe "racial tensions" was not the right phrase to describe my experience—if so the failure is my own for not finding the right one. Maybe I meant "ghetto tensions".

The ghetto teaches young men to use aggression. Poverty leads people to escape their problems through drugs; this creates an underground market, which the aggression-trained men colonize. Quick money can be made on the streets. Drug money provides a buffer against the discordant realities of poverty. Parties, nice cars, clout and often female attention are the rewards, although some sell drugs just to buy food and pay the bills. The atmosphere can be dense with troublesome stimuli: gun shots, domestic quarrels, straight bitching, break-ins and car jacks, trashiness, heckling, vandalisms, red and blue lighting up the walls at night, babies crying, hypodermic needles in the park like nobody's business, police arrests, ambulance noises at 2 am, rudeness, gang fights, all of which, repeatedly over the years, inspires a person to adopt a misanthropic and distrustful outlook. Alcoholism is general. Deadbeat moms and dads are more common than you'd like to see. It's a world where people are often treated as means. These conditions force the present as the only consideration; the past is often scarred and the future looks empty. Narrowness is the state of mind. All of this happens in the United States which has a relatively weak social support system and is basically run by plutocrats of questionable persuasion and where it is generally expected that you "make it on your own" and where failure is more often attributed to personal lack of drive or ambition and less often the circumstances. There is the influential workings of consumerist images and values which transmit the view that wealth and possessions are the only criteria by which a human being's merit is decided. Many other values one can think up don't seem to stir that many people—not artfulness, not the pursuit of knowledge or enlightenment, etc. Not surprisingly it creates resentment and envy in the have-nots when they are told implicitly that they are worthless for that reason. Within the group, imitation and verbal insults keep individuals from deviation, any sign of "weakness" be it an interest in learning or to show affection for another man, is frequently shot down and harassed. Fear and conformity bleed together. People come to believe that society has no use for them and that they have no power. Too many are arrogant fools, and failing to see how their habits ensnare them in a futile cycle, refuse to change. Money becomes an idol. There are plenty of healthy, friendly people with decent lives of course, but those who give in to nihilism tend to spoil the standard of living of everybody else. In short, it's a human mess.

I rebel when persons are robbed of their existential right to determine their own concepts of right and wrong and are subject to socially imposed self-regulation. If I reach a certain moral conclusion it is not because I have been intimidated into accepting it by the crowd. That is why I resist the "privilege checking" deal. I want to reach the morality which is arrived at by independent search. (And nobody can convince me that this isn't a morally driven set of issues.) Why is doubt of these ideas so taboo? Proponents of these privilege claims treat it as though it were already a firmly decided affair, as plain and irrevocable as  $1+1=2$ . They neglect to understand that everything is a matter of interpretation. Anyone who is supposedly one of the beneficiaries of these arrangements that doubts the existence of them,

who in other words thinks, is pigeonholed as a morally bankrupt denier. It is a form of thought control.

Some of privilege activism's talking-points just come off as wrongheaded. I read the other day that there is even claimed to be an "on the outside" type of privilege, which is the privilege of not being in jail. I suppose soon someone will call me out for my privilege of not being hit with meteorites or being alive or for not being tortured by the inquisition. On what basis is it decided that some trait or characteristic is a privilege other than a vague feeling? What is absurd and even morally suspect about this line of reasoning is that it takes ordinary, humane states of being and defines them as special undeserved assets. How is not being wronged by society a privilege—isn't this just a humane, rightful state of being? Not being wronged is distinct from being disproportionately gifted by society, this is especially the case when many kinds of wrongs are also crimes. To be let alone is neutral. Just because it isn't always doesn't mean it is a privilege, it means there has been a poor distribution of common decency. It is not always right to define a negative as an asset—you cannot confer a negative. It can be neither earned nor unearned. Any formula predicated on "you are not in an unpleasant state of being for being who you are," therefore "you are privileged" is contemptible folly. Being on the outside of jail is a neutral, average state, awarded by nobody; it's not an exotic splendid endowment like a crown. It's not an advantage by itself, although it may be relatively to someone who is incarcerated. For them a return to a state of neutrality seems like an advantage. This kind of thinking takes what is ordinary, humane, and sensible and defines it as abnormal and unjustly conferred. Along similar lines, having a certain body type is not like receiving title to an estate, and so on. Natural properties can never be privileges (although it may be an asset or liability) since they logically transcend the concept of earnability. A healthy person does not enjoy some elite status that the terminally ill has been denied. Unless it's karma or god punishing them, neither earned their fate by any sensible means. Everything earnable is limited to a sociological domain of intentions. Natural circumstances do not confer privileges since they can neither be earned nor unearned. For something to be earnable or not requires agency, and natural characteristics are indifferent in this respect. The range of human body types does not imply a corresponding distribution of privileges: it implies the indifferent fact of biodiversity. Neither is everything that is advantageous necessarily a privilege, or else we would have to concede that the chess player who got check mate is unfairly privileged for being the more talented or lucky player. The fish, so it would go otherwise, is privileged for swimming in the ocean.

To sum it up: just because a particular group of people are disadvantaged does not logically entail that those who lack that disadvantage are being granted an unfair award. It also does not entail that those who are absent the disadvantage are necessarily the cause of it. Being free of oppression is a state of humane neutrality. That someone in life has a -1 does not by necessity mean everybody else has a corresponding +1 from an objective point of view, especially when what one is calls a privilege is a neutral humane state of being. Instead they might just have a 0. This isn't to say that a certain way of life ought to be treated as the norm to which every difference should be compared and measured. It should be taken for granted that beyond a reasonable doubt every human wants to be left to be themselves without judgment, be given the means to live comfortably, to love who they choose, to not be attacked for their appearance, and so on. These are what I define as humane states of being. The mark of privilege is some excess; it is not the possession of a decent condition of life or the possession of the means to generate such a condition because one has certain traits. When someone asserts these to be privileges it comes off as deranged and I pity the people who think this way. It seems to them that life should be lived to begrudge others over pointless matters, forgetting that we are little specks in a vast cosmos that will only exist for a tiny fraction of the total time and that we'd better love while we have the chance.



When these qualities are at stake, the issue is about human rights, not arbitrary privileges. This is not a play on words.

It seems very clear that all notions of privilege would disappear if there weren't various imbalances in the structure of society, i.e. would disappear if everybody got what they wanted. The whole logic of the terminology ("advantages" "disadvantages" etc) virtually requires that we compare elements of a social structure with relative conditions of life falling along some continuum of desirability or effectiveness. It is probably true that no possible configuration of society will give everybody what they want simply from the munificence of the structure alone, partly because many important factors impinging upon human life play out beyond socioeconomics and partly because of inherent contradictions of interest that would arise when what is at stake is a finite planet that contains finitely many desirable things. Even forces of production, which make a desirable thing when moments ago it was not there, cannot give everyone the physical or mental traits that they lack and wish for in any adequate sense nor can they entirely modify intangibles such as ability, human relationships and personal differences. How much of this imbalance is attributable to accident and random mutations of every sort? How much of it is attributable to individual merit, effort, skill? How much is attributable to animal nerve and conditioned response? How much of it is attributable to agendas of oppression and class conspiracy?

These questions have to be asked anew for each specific case. Depending on the scenario a different answer to them is warranted. I am doubtful of many (not all) claims that there institutions in society structurally privilege some people at the expense of others especially these days where so many progressive victories have been won. The world is not so firmly glued together. On the ground what happens is that individuals interact with individuals in contingent transactions, in relative isolation from everybody else, with limited information and foresight about the general world of events converging and diverging all around in an ill-advised scramble of collisions, mergers, and separations. Political instruments and machinery amplify individual and group power, but this is an exception to the rule. In some instances it's hard to deduce a systematic conscious agenda shared between the discontinuities of individual lives, even among those lives that are very well connected. This strikes me as especially prescient when one considers that the human animal has an all too common tendency to operate in the service its own will, and will frequently forsake its official allegiance to an institution to pursue an immediate narrow pleasure. Isolated spur of the moment decisions and flights of fancy abound. Many people are so caught up with thinking about themselves and their insular predicament that no tight pooling of intelligence necessary to get "class consciousness" moving ever reaches critical mass. Rather than systemic conspiracy to oppress at work I'd bet what is usually at play is no more than the old bogey of habit. I am not about to deny the existence of organized group agendas. They just aren't as ubiquitous as one might first suppose. Any broad trend is as much likely to be the result of the accumulation of disconnected incidents interpreted as a pattern by an observer as it is an accumulation of deliberate schemes shared by a social faction.

This is not to say I deny the existence of unfair privilege outright: that would be as equally absurd and morally suspect as the extremism I have just pointed out. Examples of what I see as unjust privileging are disproportionate pay between men and women for equivalent work in favor of men, denial of marriage entitlements for same-sex couples by secular institutions, class-based military conscription, preferential enrollment to university based on family's previous attendance or ability to pay, racial apartheid, biased tax schemes, unmerited income disparities generally, the archaic practice of primogeniture, etc. All these cases involve an arbitrary conferral of resources or roles based on the decision-factor of some power-institution, whose discriminatory power determines who gets to have or not to have. They all extend beyond a state of humane neutrality. To the extent that a privilege can be determined, the allegation should be contained only to those to

whom it directly applies. In other words, the subclass of males who earn more than females for equivalent work plus the managers who permit it are a limited subset of all males, and those males excluded from this subset can't be said to enjoy the privilege. There is no such thing as "potential privilege" or "latent privilege": something is either directly working for you or it is not. For instance, the many unemployed/homeless males do not qualify as being complicit in this injustice. The problem is that feeble allegations of privilege can be constructed at a whim, or a contradistinction can be made for many claims of categorical privilege. A man, who in theory is rewarded by society for his gender, may enjoy the privilege of being involuntarily recruited by society, at the pain of imprisonment and public shame, to fight and suffer dismemberment, disease and death in war while the women stay home. (This is not to disrespect the many women in the armed services who serve with distinction. Even so in the United States they are protected by legislation that keeps them from being deployed in combat zones and women do not have to sign up for the Selective Service. Some women might take being restricted from the opportunity to get maimed on the battlefield to be discrimination against, but it seems very clear that it can be justifiably interpreted as discrimination in favor.) Or a man who in theory has better employment prospects than women that wants to work as preschool school teacher may be disfavored at the outset because of a fear that men are more likely to be pedophiles than women. Or a white person may be obese, live in remedial housing, suffer from substance abuse and have no connections whatsoever, or he or she may be a trendy managing executive of a fortune 500 company that has never had to confront a truly difficult or dirty thing in life. Another example, while it is historically true that women were barred from obtaining higher education there are now more women in college than men and men have higher dropout rates ([http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/assignment\\_7&id=4036900](http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/assignment_7&id=4036900)). You could claim that less intelligent people enjoy an unfair privilege. I'm being serious. It's true that unusually intelligent people especially in mainstream American society have to deal with all kinds of social alienation and resentment. Most people would rather enjoy simpler activities than to contemplate the order of the universe. From what I have encountered many Americans on the street seem frightened by too much intelligence as if it were embarrassing or bizarre. They react to an intellectual statement as though someone had blasphemed. But with a wave of the magic wand you could flip it around and say that it is the less intelligent that are underprivileged, being that they are less likely to get high paying jobs more likely to face trouble with the law, and are generally deprived of a complete engagement in the potentials of human experience.

How about living longer? On average women live considerably longer than men. Should men protest this injustice? It's not an injustice. But it can be arbitrarily construed as an injustice by anyone with an agenda. Sometimes it really just is what it is. What I see here is not evidence of uniformly systematic privileging based on any trait, but the willy-nilly chaos of history and human relationships. It is this chaos that weakens the credibility of some of the attributions.

Once the principle of human variation is acknowledged as holding valid it becomes clear that all these categorical notions lack solid representational accuracy. The problem is about tracing causality. How can we know for sure a certain advantage is derivable from a putatively privileged trait (whiteness, maleness, class, etc) and not individual merit? Does individual merit not exist at all? Does it have no role in the outplay of human destinies? A man might get a job that a woman also applied for, but to call this sexism by default is dubious. We have to look at the peripheral evidence of credentials, workplace experience, whether or not personality traits are compatible with the job as determined by interview, and so on before such a conclusion is justifiable. Gender in such a case can be a mere dummy variable,

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but if activists see the whole world in terms of categories that are inflated beyond actual reality they are going to conclude that a man got hired and a woman didn't, sexism plain and simple. If you can't demonstrate causality in this scenario that assumption verges on bigotry.

This is not to downplay cases where sexism is blatant. My grandmother, a real feminist, was the first woman to get a job as floor manager for Kodak at the factory where she worked before the collapse of their instant camera market forced them to shut it down in 1986. A widow raising three young kids and working full-time, she was bullied by the male-dominated management who presupposed her incompetence. She claimed she ran things better than any of them.

All talk of privilege involves a statistical or relative frame of reference. I realize that from a certain angle of comparison I am privileged, but privilege exists on a continuum of gradations, not binary on or off states. One thinks of the millions of human beings on earth without access to adequate housing, nutrition, recreation, education, medical care, sanitation or civil liberties. (China, for instance, has a population larger than the entire population of the United States living in poverty.) Maybe it is just a semantic quibble to define "nutrition," etc, as a privilege, but if there is anything to go against that definition it is the moral connotations of that term, as though some people receive nutrition because they hold some special card or were given societal permission to eat well.

Among privileges the one which seems to be the central factor, in that it can negate a lack of privilege in other criteria, is wealth. Fundamentally at issue is power, i.e. the capacity for an agent to modify circumstances so that they are consistent with its goals. Arguably most of the problems concerning social unfairness circle around the age-old dilemma of the haves and the have-nots. Race, gender, and other factors are marginal next to economic class, which has the power to nullify or intensify difficulties or benefits associated with the other categories. There are sure relations between these variables that go both ways. It can and has been the case that race acts as a setback in the obtainment of economic stature, etc. But it can be an error of mistaking correlation with causation to say that a person has a certain economic status because of their race, although this is a matter of historical context. Just because two (or more) events coincide doesn't mean the one is the cause of the other.

Not everything is a social construct. For example, I will probably be vilified for saying this, the tenacious stigma against female promiscuity probably has more to do with biology than an arbitrary norm. In sexually reproducing species males typically operate to get their genes replicated in the next generation. In some species the male sticks around after conception to assist rearing the brood instead of running off to try their luck reproducing elsewhere, as is frequently the case with human males. If the female in this equation is promiscuous, the probability that her offspring is not genetically derived from the male in the parental role is increased. Heterosexual males have evolved an unconscious tendency to perceive promiscuous females as reproductively untrustworthy, because their implicit object is to maximize their genetic replication and not some stranger's. (Incidentally this also explains why female virginity is such a big deal in so many cultures.) This is not to make a normative statement about what ought to be. Neither does it suggest fatalism. It is clear that while there may be an innate bias, it is not rigidly fixed and is subject to change by social learning.

Many more examples such as this could be described. One more will do because it is very important. Consider genetic nepotism as the primary cause for racism. Nepotism is the tendency to unconsciously favor, feel increased empathy for, and selectively associate with one's "tribe kin" or people who resemble oneself, as this resemblance is a proxy for genetic relatedness. In other words it may be innately easier for a person of a given race to count someone of the same race part of their in-group preferentially to someone of another race. No decent person wants to

accept that racism is partially innate because that makes it seem inevitable. At least overt forms of racist behavior can be weeded out by thorough association between races early on in life. During development, children acquire an imprint of who their tribe-kin are by looking and speaking to those around them who they interact with altruistically, mainly close relatives, who are usually but not invariably of the same race. People who haven't had the opportunity to forge deep and intimate associations with people of other races early on in life often have to learn how to inhibit feelings of uneasiness when first encountering them, but through continual communication and positive interaction they can come to fully internalize the other's humanity.

These types of explanations aren't complete and could be wrong, but at least they are plausible. Of course there is an entire additional political dimension made up of legislature and rules. Then there is another dimension of media-depiction, which may reinforce negative or positive perceptions of certain constituencies. Here is not the place to figure out how that works.

I know that some reject explanations from biology because it contradicts the premise that everything must be an arbitrary sociological convention. What are sociological conventions build atop of if not the billions of interconnected, secreting and metabolizing cells fitted into place and running according to routines set up by genetic evolution that make each and every one of us? To say biology has nothing to do with society is like saying ocean water has nothing to do with the tides.

So much can be explained in terms of how the brain works. All race-based judgments are a function of an involuntary response called perceptual categorization. This is what enables you to locate an orange among apples. The brain focuses on where there is a break in uniformity, a difference in a repeated pattern of colors and shapes in this case, and activates attention to bring to bear on the point of difference. When a white person walks into a room full of black people, or a black person into a room full of white people, the brain automatically detects the break in the pattern and it becomes topic for attention. It just happens, like breathing—it's built into how the brain's components interact based on how they were placed together by nature. It's not any more racist than detecting an orange among apples is racist.

Having now dealt with theory I'll move on to the methodology of the activism. Efforts should be focused on accepting and showing compassion to the disadvantaged and forming methods to help them to overcome their adversity and raising sympathetic awareness of their situation to the public, not focused on a campaign to assail that public in an effort to get it to fess up to its relative advantages. We should not begrudge people who are able to live dignified lives because they lack some terrible burden. This is a waste of time and a poor investment of personal energies. It doesn't help the people who need it. It even does them a disservice by drawing attention away from the task of assisting them to learn the skills of self-love that they can use to thrive. To make a person feel bad for not having to deal with the challenges of being disabled or gay or transgender is to bark up the wrong tree. Note that that this is not the same as raising awareness about the challenges of being disabled or gay or transgender. In contrast, someone who unreasonably discriminates on the basis of physical ability or who expresses homophobia or transphobia should be corrected in the way that one corrects someone for committing a basic arithmetic mistake. Unless they are deliberately spiteful, guilt should have nothing to do with it. More often than one might suppose these deeds are committed not out of malice but out of a slip of the mind or from an understandable lack of familiarity.

The doctrinaire slogan "check your privilege!" stated usually with much so sharp certitude, is a cheap and underhanded way to attempt to drill a conscience into someone without doing any of the subtle work of persuasion. "This is my situation! It is important and relevant and please listen!" is a useful cry that draws attention to those who need it, whereas "check your privilege!" is unnecessarily confrontational and distracting. (Also, could someone clear up a quibble? By



"check" do you mean "forcefully halt or inhibit" or do you mean "introspectively reflect upon"? If you notice nothing gets accomplished with this slogan because it doesn't inspire anyone to do anything that is actually socially useful. All it does is make people feel self-conscious. Great. Even if it did lead to an awakening, it provides no further motivation to improve the situation of others which is what actually matters. How about "be more sympathetic to the less fortunate and accept those who are different!" for a slogan? This would at least address the underlying problems.

All that we need of the public is to ask it to accept and to give something in place of what they take. To be considerate to those who suffer because of the society around them and to change their ways if they happen to interfere with another's well being. Digging into the people who are not suffering because of the society around them is counterproductive. What is immeasurably more useful is not to get someone to realize how their status grants them unequal benefits, but to inspire them to be compassionate towards those who have been faced with needless adversities. This could excite a build-up of democratic feedback. Those who have power aren't going to create structures to benefit those in need if they aren't made to sympathize first. And since they aren't rationally going to concede their power, the best option is to try and reform the ethical composition of society from within the existing system. Lines of thinking epitomized by "check your privilege!" point the finger at the wrong person, in an accusative tone that more likely than anything will only spur ego-defense mechanisms.

Here's something that occurred to me but I don't know if I believe it: Many ideologues on campus get caught up in perceiving themselves as contrarian and heterodox, but because their system of assertions is defined in opposition to some one rigid tradition or another, they fail to see how rigid and intolerant to dissent their system is being that it is logically bound in opposition to the other system. To oppose a convention in its entirety you must create a convention which is just as uncompromising in order to exclude contradictions which would dissolve it from inside. You cannot simply negate or ignore a convention and say that you have an argument against it. This happens because you must map one-to-one a counter-statement to every statement, a counteraction to every action in the opposing convention. Your statements must be rhetorically unyielding in order to survive refutation, which means that they do not change even when critiqued. So in this way you often come to mirror the dogmatic style of argumentation that you see the rival system possesses. The beliefs come to resemble grappling hooks which have tied you to an oppositional frame of mind. If you could just dig your heels in, think freely at square one using your own hallowed and unique experience, you could escape this dilemma.

Like a novelist imagining how to think like somebody else, it's a great skill to adopt a contrary set of beliefs to dress up in temporarily, for not only does this allow you to see them inside-out and therefore disprove them more effectively, but any grains of truth that might cling to them can be absorbed. Only in this way can you keep from blinding yourself to reality.

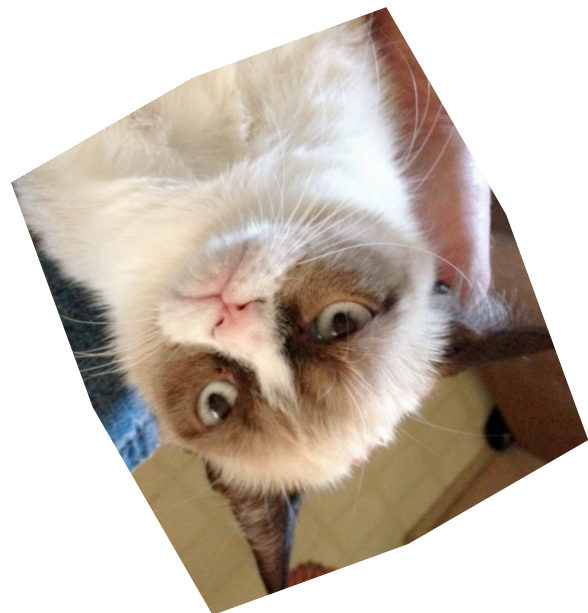
In the last I argue that the individual is the most important in society because only the individual is not an abstraction. Gender, class, race, nationality, etc—these are mental appearances, categories which the brain formulates because it has an involuntary compulsion to organize the data of experience into models. That doesn't mean they have a direct impact on life, but in reality it's just atoms in the void. We raise these abstractions up and associate ourselves with them because we are frightened of the effort necessary to forge a sense of self out of the seemingly paltry material of our singular personhood, which is the only fact that is directly given and not acquired. But the individual is much realer than these categories. It is the fleshy thing that we embody, that feels pain and which inhabits the center of a consciousness. It contains far more detail than the surface indexes of race, class, and gender. Focusing solely on these variables and their relationships is overly reductionist and discards the much deeper and interesting detail of independent

personhoods. It makes everything out to be in terms of giant "race/gender/class blobs" which in the end turns out to be subtly dehumanizing because it invalidates each distinct human story, which is only told on the individual level. Of course each individual has a social nature which connects it to broader webs of humanity, but you reach a certain point where there is no way to generalize statements about giant demographics without spreading the details too thin.

I can imagine someone saying, "yeah but individualism... ain't it just an ideology of powerful white men anyways? They promote individualism because they can make things happen. What good does individualism have to the exploited who have nothing but their sense of community, to the child prostitute or poor street urchin in the third-world that must subsist by scavenging trash dumps?" It must be accepted that the ideology of individualism has many flaws and runs the risk of atomizing us into disconnected egoists. In the west it is implicated in the endemic rise of the facebook-fueled "me generation" of absolute narcissism. Certainly if lived out too radically it can lead to despair. That said, to my mind it seems like the only solution to avoid viewing others (mostly strangers) as part of a giant blob.

The confusion and acid disagreement about these issues stems from believing too much in the reality of the abstractions, which are useful because they are portable and linguistic, but which divide the infinitely various world into uniform conceptual blocks to save us time and mental effort. We learn to discredit what is right before our eyes in favor of linguistic devices. The abstractions subordinate the distinct individual presence to frigid impersonal systems. Instead of forming ideas that claim to define whole groups, we must be discerning and take the effort to recognize the distinctness of each person's unique profile, and the unique profile of their social existence. By counting the individual first, we have to be much more distrustful of our generalizations and to put those beneath their important standpoint.

That's what I have to say. The reason was that I wanted to start thinking about these complicated things.



# Mail Call:

Your Letters; My Frothing Disdain  
Fiona Stewart-Taylor

An Open Letter to Jordan Miron  
Emil Kolk

Dear Jordan Miron,

As I walked into Saga on Wednesday for lunch, I managed to catch the end of a distressed conversation at the front desk which led me to read your short essay in The Omen. I must admit, if your experience truly was as horrible as you claim, I cannot fault you for your decision to boycott Saga.

However, I fear you may have been less than awake when you wrote to The Omen (and, if you've not been eating well, I can understand entirely). Therefore, allow me to point out a few mistakes in your essay—only a few, as a plethora of papers, novels, novellas, and a feature length film would be necessary to detail the sheer multitude of mishaps present (perhaps you might wish to frequent the Writing Center, I've heard they're terribly helpful).

Where to begin? Perhaps paragraph three, where you state that "there's this sorta hot girl behind the counter, like a 7 out of 10" would be a good point. First of all, if this person is—as you've stated—a girl (and Reddit being an 18+ site, I can assume you are of legal age), you should probably not be commenting on her "hotness". However, if the cashier is a woman, you should make no comment there, either. Excuse you, but women—humans of any gender, really—are not here to be your sex objects. Beyond which, rating a person's "hotness" only proliferates the stereotype that there is an ideal beauty, and in a culture as hyper-saturated as our own is with anti-human body images such comments cannot be condoned. All bodies are beautiful, and all

bodies whose owners want them to be sexy, are. There is no "scale of sexiness," and no one—not even an educated second-year such as yourself—has the right to tell another person how "hot" or "sexy" they are.

Also, in regards to your comment about complimenting ears, I would like to state that there is nothing that all girls like, because humans as a species are diverse and beautiful, and our tastes and preferences vary wildly. The misogynistic and frankly incorrect assumption that girls exist to be looked at is not one I believe many Hampshire students would be quick to overlook or forgive.

On to paragraphs five and six, in which you claim that the kitchen staff is guilty of both atrocious grammatical errors and verbal abuse (I will not detail why your claims regarding the goose are ridiculous, as anyone who's ever encountered a goose knows that it would require massive amounts of food to cover up even a gosling). It has been my experience—admittedly, only approximately a month's worth thereof—that the kitchen staff is nothing but kind, open-minded individuals who spend their days making life easier for those of us who do enjoy Saga's food. I do not feel that your comments about them, or about Roberta, are rooted in any form in facts, and I would like to remind both you and the editors that libel is illegal.

Finally, in paragraph six, you state that you "have many friends who are homosexual and [you] respect their decision." I'm not entirely sure where to begin telling you what is wrong with this statement. First of all, you tell us that this (your having friends who are gay) is your reason for being "shocked" by the reported fact that the word gay was used as an insult against you. As a human being of any shade of decency, you should be angered when words regarding a person's identity are used as insults. Also, you note that sexual orientation is a choice. I don't think I need to remind either you, or any person at Hampshire, that sexual orientation and gender are beyond our control.



In conclusion, Jordan, perhaps it would have been better for you to have written your hate-mongering letter on paper and kept it in a 'never to be sent' folder in your desk. Thank you for your time.

Emil Kolk

P.S. To the editing staff of The Omen: I am aware that you do not take responsibility for the content of your publication. However, at the very least, placing a "Trigger Warning" at the beginning of this article would have been deeply appreciated. I don't know about anyone else, but I'm sick of misogynistic and homophobic bullshit showing up all around me. Let's be adults, please, and take responsibility for what we do.

Hey Emil- Thanks for writing in! We've absolutely taken your suggestion about trigger warnings to heart, and we've placed one on an article most of the staff found particularly onerous to read this issue.

My concerns are twofold: First, it wouldn't take all that much food to cover a goose, depending on the viscosity of the food in question. Second, the Omen doesn't just "not take responsibility for" our content. It isn't our content! The Omen as an institution has no editorial policy except that we print any non-libelous submissions from a member of the Hampshire community, printed under the submitters real name. Because Jordan's article was either satire or a modernized script for the movie Fantasia, it met both of our criteria. The Omen is a literal free speech publication- as of right now, our Editor doesn't even always read submissions before going to print.

The Omen is just a soap box. It is up to you if you lather up, or rinse off.

Love,  
Fiona



# Hey Omenites-

Mail Call is a new feature here at The Omen, where we are **ACTIVELY SOLICITING** your responses to content in the Omen, the Hampshire community, the world at large, and instagram pictures of your lunch.

The opinions expressed in Mail Call responses may or may not reflect the opinions of the Omen staff, which consists of whoever shows up for layout, but do not represent an official policy stance of The Omen as a publication.

Both letter writers and letter responders are solely responsible for their text, content, and the quality of instagram filters they select. No libelous submissions will be accepted, but you knew that. Anonymous submissions will be published at the discretion and sole responsibility of the Mail Call editor.

The Omen Loves You.

-Fiona Stewart-Taylor

Limo	Location	<p>Relationship: The Happy couple Regina &amp; Rico "The MANHATTEN" Sanchez <del>Need to get over</del> <del>Anasty</del></p>
Object New: Wedding dress fit for a porn star	<p>Mayhem=  A frantic chase</p>	<p>Relationship Groom and long suffering best-man</p>

A Fiasco:

Allison McCarthy, Will Shattuc, F. Stewart-Taylor



need:

to get laid  
by some drunk  
brides ~~grooms~~ men

Paranoia

What seems like dumb  
luck isn't - things are  
a foot

Need: to get over  
a Nasty prejudice  
(Catholics)

Marcus

Regina's Highschool

Friend with  
a mullet

~~Relationship~~  
wedding photographer  
# one who can't be photographed

**THE END, GO HOME!**